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What Does Air Resource Management Mean to You?

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Forest Service
Southern Region

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The Air Resource

Air, soil and water are basic resources managed by the Forest Service. They serve as the cornerstones for the development of more tangible resources such as fish, wildlife and vegetation. Air quality can affect all organisms. It can also affect other features of national forests. Aesthetics, visibility, cultural features, soil and water quality may be affected by air pollution. Air is the most dynamic resource the Forest Service manages. It surrounds all things, constantly changes, originates in distant places, and in it's purest form, is impossible to see, taste, or smell.

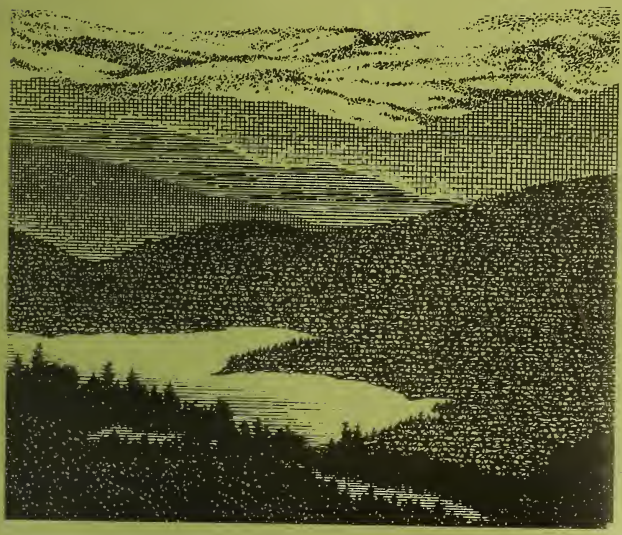
The Forest Service And Air Resource Management

Under the Clean Air Act (CAA), the Forest Service cooperates with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and State air regulatory agencies on mutual goals. The Forest Service is in the unique position of being an emitter and a receiver of air pollution.

Routine practices (timber management, prescribed burning, vehicle operation and storage facilities) contribute to the overall air pollution in a given area. As a Federal agency, the Forest Service must comply with regulations for controlling pollution originating from it's facilities (lands, buildings, roads etc.). The Forest Service has also become a national leader in smoke management techniques to mitigate the effects of smoke from prescribed burning on the environment and human health.

The 1977 Amendments to the CAA designated certain national parks, international parks, and national wildernesses as Class I areas. In the Class I areas managed by the Forest Service, the agency seeks to protect the air quality and resources from air pollution.

The Forest Service (FS) fulfills its responsibilities by complying with Federal facility regulations. FS staff specialists identify, inventory and monitor the resources that can be affected by air pollution. They determine acceptable levels of protection and convey this information to the air regulatory agencies. They report impacts on resources by air pollutants. Federal land managers also participate with the air regulatory agencies to develop implementation plans, disseminate information and review Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) permit applications.



Area Designations

The 1977 Amendments designated Class I, II and III areas. All have air quality better than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards established by EPA. Class I includes certain national parks, international parks and national wilderness areas that met size criteria and existed as of August 1977. Nationally,

there are 156 Class I areas. Of these, 88 are managed by the Forest Service; 47 are managed by the USDI National Park Service and 21 are managed by the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service. Nine Class I areas totaling about 139,000 acres are managed by the Forest Service in the Southern Region.

The remaining 13 million acres of wilderness and general forest area managed by the Forest Service in the Southern Region are Class II. About 503,000 acres of this total are contained in 64 wildernesses.

Protection of the air quality in Class III areas is not as stringent as for Class I or Class II areas. No areas of the national forests in the Southern Region are classified as Class III.

Air-Quality-Related Values

Air Quality Related Values (AQRV) are those features or properties of the Class I area that initially made these places worthy of special designation as wildernesses. The 1977 Amendments specifically indicated that visibility is an AQRV and is an important feature of most Class I areas. Air pollution can have an adverse effect on AQRV and thus degrade the purpose for which these areas were established. Therefore, the highest level of protection is given to these Class I areas.

The major components of the Forest Service's Air Resource Management program are the protection of AQRV in Class I areas, protection of forest resources on the remainder of the National Forests and to minimize or manage the air pollution from

forest management activities, especially smoke from the use of fire in its natural role in the ecosystem.

Air pollution does not affect all of a forest's features equally. Therefore, sensitive or fragile features will be identified and monitored to determine the impacts on the AQRV and forest resources.

Prevention of Significant Deterioration

The 1977 Amendments established a permit process to prevent significant deterioration of air quality in Class I and Class II areas. This process is named for its goal–Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD)–and balances economic development with protection of the air quality. The PSD process allows increases in the ambient concentrations of air pollutants only to a certain point. These allowable increases or increments are established by EPA. The sources of the pollutants must generally restrict their emissions to amounts that do not exceed the increments or cause adverse impacts on AQRV. The increments for Class I areas are smaller than those for Class II areas, thus protecting the air quality to a greater degree.

The Federal land managers are charged to protect the AQRV in Class I areas from air pollutants. As part of the process, these managers respond to permit applications. The managers must determine potential effects of predicted air emissions on AQRV. They must weigh the significance of any changes that these effects will have. Based on these determi-

nations, the Federal land managers respond to the State air regulatory agencies by recommending that a permit either be issued, modified to afford greater protection of AQRV, or denied.

The Federal Land Manager participates in the PSD program in Class II areas, although review of such permit applications is not a requirement of the Clean Air Act. Protection of forest resources in Class II areas is accomplished by developing effective working relations and partnerships with the State air regulatory agencies.

Interagency Cooperation

Air Resource Management is a cooperative effort by Federal, State and local agencies to protect the quality of air for human health and public welfare while allowing for controlled economic expansion. The EPA has overall responsibility for related activities and establishes national standards for air quality, performance standards for emitters, and general oversight. State air regulatory agencies may establish standards that are more stringent than the national standards. They may then develop and implement plans to attain and maintain these standards. They issue permits and coordinate activities with permit applicants, land managers and EPA.

For More Information

For more information regarding Air Resource Management in the Southern Region, contact your local Forest Service office or:

Director, Soil, Water and Air Staff
USDA Forest Service
1720 Peachtree Road, N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30367-9102
Telephone (404) 347-7209

NATIONAL FORESTS AND FOREST SERVICE CLASS I WILDERNESSES IN THE SOUTHERN REGION